Ivo Karadimov and Jeff Winstel

Interviewed by Zachary Schrag, July 7, 2021

The conversation took place as a recorded Zoom teleconference. This transcript was generated by Zoom, then edited by all three participants.

Zachary Schrag:

Zachary Schrag is interviewing Ivo Karadimov. Do I have that pronunciation right? It's July 7 2021 and we're doing this by Zoom.

Could I just ask first about your role at WMATA. I know you joined in 2009. What is your official title, what are your duties at the authority?

Ivo Karadimov:

My title is director of architecture.

My role is to oversee the architectural design for all new construction and renovation of public and non-public WMATA facilities.

I'm also responsible for space planning and interior design for administrative office facilities.

And in addition I supervise signage, wayfinding, and Art in Transit programs for the authority. It's kind of a broad range of responsibility, I started as an architect for WMATA in 2009. And I was promoted to manager of architecture in 2011 after a competitive selection process. My title was subsequently updated to director of architecture, a few years later.

Zachary Schrag:

I'm trying to understand the scope—you mentioned non-public facilities. Obviously you're dealing with stations. Do you deal with things like the chiller plants and the elevated structures and the other parts that make up WMATA infrastructure? I'm trying to figure out the borderline between architecture and engineering, especially.

Ivo Karadimov:

As long as there's architectural design involved in any type of facility, I get involved in the project.

As far as purely infrastructural, such as bridges or chiller plants, not necessarily. But definitely railyards, bus facility, bus maintenance facility, other maintenance or storage facilities, support facilities. As long as there is an impact to the architectural envelope. I am involved in reviewing the design.

Zachary Schrag:

Okay, and are you involved at all in railcar design?

Ivo Karadimov:

Unfortunately, no, and that's something that you're familiar with, WMATA is a very large organization and one of the challenges in large organizations is having to deal with multiple groups or multiple groups of people, as we call it "silos."

And I've been trying for years to actually get in touch with the design team that is responsible for selection of the new railcar design, but I was unsuccessful. Typically, I see the railcar designs after the fact, after everything's been already approved and ready to go.

Zachary Schrag:

Got it. I'm just getting a message from Jeff Winstel. Apparently he's trying to get in. I'm going to pause recording for a second.

[pause in recording]

Okay, so with luck we'll be able to get this Mr. Winstel in, but that's very helpful to know about the railcars, because, as you probably know, this goes back again 50 years now, with Weese having done has design for the railcars and that being sent off to a different firm but there were, I think, some efforts to connect them.

Oh here he is.

Okay, Mr. Winstel, I see you're joining I don't see you on video yet. Can you hear us?

Jeff Winstel:

Can you hear me?

Zachary Schrag:

Yes, there you go.

Jeff Winstel:

Okay sorry about that.

Zachary Schrag:

No worries. Glad to see you. Okay, so we were just talking a little bit about the organization at WMATA and the limits of the architecture responsibility, how it covers a lot of structures that the public know that doesn't necessarily see but doesn't cover everything the public sees, such as the railcars.

We are recording. I will run quotations by each of you, before I use them, and you can also make a decision later about whether to allow me to deposit the full recording at GW. I know they'd be glad to see it, but you can decide later if she feel comfortable with that.

Could I ask you, Mr. Winstel, to say a little bit about when you arrived at WMATA and also what your job responsibilities are?

Jeff Winstel:

Yes, I started at WMATA in May of 2015 and my title is architectural historian. My primary job responsibilities included dealing with section 106, which is a regulatory responsibility for recipients of federal grant money regarding impacts, to the historic structures and also kind of helping out with the Commission of Fine Arts review of projects and documenting and assessing the historic significance of the Metro for national register purposes.

Zachary Schrag:

And, just to be clear, that’s section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act?

Jeff Winstel:

Yes.

Zachary Schrag:

Excellent.

I realize that this may be before your time, Mr. Winstel, but I did want to start with the Model Station of the Future plan, because I think that brought a lot of attention to the preservation challenges at Metro.

In part, it serves as a really good problem statement. It mentions that the stations were getting dirty, that they were getting dark, that there was congestion at the fare gates—this was of course set a period of near peak ridership—that there were some problems with the traction: the tiles getting slippery, especially when wet.

It lists a bunch of problems, and I thought that'd be a good way to start: what are the problems that you need to solve in order to keep the system running? Maybe we should just go there. So far I've got dirt, darkness, poor traction, and congestion. Are there other big ones that keep coming up?

Ivo Karadimov:

No, I think you actually listed them, the more important ones that were the primary concern for WMATA.

Just to give you a little bit of a background on how this effort started. Funding, obviously, is the is the driving force behind all the station improvements at WMATA and, as you know, we are a semi-sustained financially organization. We rely on local governments for funding, so funding is not necessarily always available for us to do improvements for our stations.

In 2013, there was this period where all of a sudden funding became available, and there was this effort—almost like an urgent effort to do something—knowing that our system is aging, and we have to come up with a way to introduce essentially a new look for WMATA underground stations. Not necessarily changing entirely the station itself, but making it look better for customers.

We need to also understand that the system and the original stations were designed more than 50 years ago. So obviously a lot of things have changed since the 70s. One thing that is obvious is the capacity. There were far more people using the system in 2013—compared to the amount of people that use the system at the very beginning.

Wear and tear were also visible. It became apparent that something needs to be done, and this is how this effort, essentially, started.

Now, as far as WMATA's approach to the effort, in retrospect I would say it was probably not fully thought through. I don't think we actually did our homework, so to speak. So we kind of jumped into this task very excited to do something, having some ideas that we have brainstormed internally but, as you know the downside of being excited to do something quick, is that you don't think it through and it wasn't necessarily developed fully. That's how the video was developed; it was based on some very preliminary concept ideas. The video got promoted almost as an advertising, which to me was another flaw of WMATA's external communication. And that's what basically prompted the response from the different external agencies.

Zachary Schrag:

Great.

You obviously got some pushback from the agencies and from individuals, I think that maybe I was in there as well.

What happened next? I understand that at some point, you took that feedback. And I know William Gallagher got involved. But I don't really have a sense of how that happened. Given that reaction to the 2013 video, how did you then do the homework?

Ivo Karadimov:

After that reaction essentially came out, I met with the senior leadership. Basically we started thinking about a new strategy to better inform external agencies and maybe pause the process until we have better communicated the intent of this effort.

My first contact was with the Commission of Fine Arts at the staff level. We met and we started a conversation. They obviously were very concerned that this is going to be an unsanctioned effort essentially: WMATA going rogue and doing something without proper vetting.

At that point we set essentially the parameters of the process with the Commission of Fine Arts.

I knew that WMATA is not going to be able to handle this effort on our own, and we decided to engage Bill Gallagher and his team. Now, I must say that Bill has been a consultant for WMATA

for many years. He is well known within WMATA. My predecessor and Bill were good friends. So having Bill as part of the team actually changed the dynamics. It definitely reset the whole process again. We started having weekly meetings with Bill's team and follow his guidance. With all the knowledge and experience that he has, he was instrumental in developing the revised submission to the Commission of Fine Arts, which I believe was in January 2014, the following year.

Zachary Schrag:

And can I just ask who will predecessor that had worked with him?

Ivo Karadimov:

That was Mr. Edward Riley.

Zachary Schrag:

Riley.

Ivo Karadimov:

I think you have met him.

Zachary Schrag:

I may well have.

This is exactly what I'm interested in: how the institutional arrangements surrounding Metro with groups like the Commission of Fine Arts affects the efforts.

You came out with a 2014 plan, and then I think you had told me earlier that that never progressed as far as you would have wished. Is that right?

Ivo Karadimov:

Unfortunately, yes.

Again, it all came back full circle to available funding. By the time we went back to redesign the station of the future and presented it to the Commission of Fine Arts, the funding was no longer in place or it was used for other activities. At which point the design was unfortunately shelved for better times when funding will become available.

Zachary Schrag:

Is there an official document that contains that 2014 vision?

You said there was a proposal for the Commission of Fine Arts. What is the thing that that produced?

Ivo Karadimov:

The updated vision was put together in presentation to the Commission of Fine Arts staff level.

I believe I sent you a copy of that 2014 presentation. That was actually the updated version of the station in the future.

Zachary Schrag:

I'm not sure if I have that or not, but we can talk about that off the recording.

And that remains kind of what you would like to do if you have the money? Is that fair to say, more or less?

Ivo Karadimov:

Yes, it is fair to say. A lot of years have passed since 2014 and things have progressed, especially in terms of technology. I would say primarily lighting has changed. Digital displays technology for customer information has also changed a lot since 2014.

The overall strategy is the same in terms of finish materials, keeping certain historic elements in place while introducing new elements.

But the actual elements, the technology of the new elements have changed as well.

Zachary Schrag:

Great. I'll want to get into the lighting in a moment, because I think that's going to be part of the story definitely. But since you mentioned finishes I should probably ask about that.

One of the controversial elements of the 2013 idea was to have less bronze and more stainless steel. If I'm correct, I think we already see that at NoMa and some of the newer stations. I wonder if you could just talk—either one of you, more generally—about the trade-offs between some of the design decisions that we made in 1968, say, and what you've learned from half a century of experience. I think you had said, maybe the stainless steel is easier to clean. The bronze is a challenge, right? That there are some parts of that 2014—well, I think, with any plan you're balancing different imperatives.

So I just wonder if you could talk about like the trade-offs where you said in 2014, yes, we will keep the bronze, even though we know that's more maintenance intensive. Is that is that the kind of decision you were making?

Ivo Karadimov:

Yes, right. Natural bronze is a beautiful material. Unfortunately, it presents challenges when it comes to maintenance or replacement.

First of all, bronze—if it's not maintained properly or frequently—becomes dirtier and more difficult to clean. When it comes to replacement, there are only a few manufacturers, these days, that can actually deliver natural bronze and at a very high cost. The idea was to keep the bronze or Metro brown, for that matter, in certain areas that are not subject to high traffic. And in the areas that are subject to high traffic, such as vertical circulation—stairs, escalators, elevators or the fare gates, it was determined that another more durable and easier to maintain material be introduced, which is how we came to a conclusion to essentially establish what we call a mixed palette of finishes where we keep the Metro bronze in addition to introducing stainless steel. And that's what you're probably going to see more and more, in our stations.

Jeff, do you want to chime in?

Jeff Winstel:

Yes. I think I could give a little historic context for this.

It was Harry Weese's intent and, especially CFA's, that they use the highest quality materials possible. And that was part of the decision to go with bronze.

I found it interesting to learn that Harry wanted the bronze to wear to a natural patina. Now,—if you rub bronze it will stay bronze. So the handrails are a nice bronze. The parts that are not touched, they're more brown. So allowing that kind of natural patina, a reflection of use patterns occurs and makes, I think, overall, the metal look dirty.

That is one effect that I question Harry on. But it is kind of a consequence that I don't think was really anticipated, because it is a very high maintenance material and is unattractive and uneven if not maintained.

Zachary Schrag:

That one of the things I'm trying to get at—I think I put in the questions—is that there's some learning from experience here. One of the things to balance, I think, with a historic structure that is used by hundreds of thousands of people, especially is to what extent is this a museum to Harry Weese, and to what extent is this something that belongs to the present generation.

What you said about mixed palette seems to me an effort again at balancing. There's not going to be a single right answer, but some kind of balancing process.

I don't know—I think for this audience, which is going to be people in preservation—they might be very interested to hear in general, how do you even way those two considerations, where you see a conflict between the historic design and what you've what the institution has learned from experience.

Jeff Winstel:

Can I jump in on that? Okay, some of the work I've done is really doing a comprehensive inventory of the stations that were part of the original plan and because they were built over a 25 year period.

It was kind of hard to wrap my mind around what is a Harry Weese Metro station. One of the things that he was working from was what he called his elements of continuity.

When he was dealing with the CFA board, he was getting pressure from some members to make all the stations the same, and getting pressure from other members to make them all different like Montreal, which kept being mentioned. So he came up with what is what he called like a tool kit, and Harry was great with the big idea, and then when it came down to really identifying what was in the tool kit, that's where it gets a little squishy. But there are certain concepts that really ground his design and that is a sense of openness, monumentality—certainly the domes in the underground stations are meant to convey a sense of Washington monumental core, monumentality. That would be one of those elements of continuity.

Some things that are less important? He had very little if nothing to say about the fare gates, so that gave us a little more leeway. At the same time, that sense of openness was very key to his design, because the big deal was not to make New York, where you feel trapped and crowded, and you don't know what's around the next corner. Putting up fare gates that are like the ones they have in New York—that are a person's height—would be something that would kind of kill that effect of openness.

There's 46 elements of continuity we came up with. I think, by doing that, we have identified what are the most important aspects of the design, from the architects' standpoint and also CFA's standpoint at the time. This also identified things that are not so important, where there's more leeway to change.

Zachary Schrag:

I have got two follow up questions.

The first is just—Mr Winstel, was there, someone in your position before you came, or was your position, created a to deal with some of the kind of concerns that were raised?

Jeff Winstel:

I am my own creation.

Zachary Schrag:

Again I'm really interested in in the institutional elements of this. how did your position get created? Could either of you speak to that?

Ivo Karadimov:

I can speak on that, since I was actually involved in the process of creating Jeff's position. The architectural historian position was created in response to an effort to reach out to the historic preservation officers. Part of it actually was a result of the feedback that WMATA received after publishing the Station of the Future design.

Many external agencies reached out to WMATA directly expressing concerns, and especially with the historic preservation being the main focus. WMATA decided to be more open, more transparent and to start engaging into conversation about historic preservation, knowing that at some point in a distant or near future the system will be registered as historic.

So that's how that position was actually created, it was a direct result of WMATA starting the process, learning more about the historic preservation and trying to adjust itself to it.

Zachary Schrag:

So if I could clarify. I think you said historic preservation *officers*, so are you dealing with DC, Virginia, and Maryland?

Ivo Karadimov:

Yes, we are. And Jeff can speak to that, yes.

Zachary Schrag:

Okay, so all three jurisdictions have their own historic preservation offices and are looking over your shoulder. Is that fair?

Jeff Winstel:

Yes, in addition to the National Capital Planning Commission which has its own federal preservation officer.

Zachary Schrag:

Okay, and the CFA.

Jeff Winstel:

Yeah, yeah. It's a party.

Zachary Schrag:

I don't know if you can say this, but are they pulling in the same direction or in different directions?

Jeff Winstel:

Most of this is grounded in what's called the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties.

I've worked in historic preservation over 30-some years, and I've worked with these standards throughout my career, along with National Register eligibility

For the most part the SHPOs [state historic preservation officers] and NCPC are pulling in the same direction. Usually that's consistent with what CFA is looking for.

In fact, there is a very close relationship between CFA and the DC SHPO. I have not experienced many incidents where they disagreed. I can only think of a few, and it was kind of like, majority rules so let's move on.

Zachary Schrag:

And anything you're anticipating registration. Am I correct that Metro is not yet landmarked anywhere?

Jeff Winstel:

That is correct.

Zachary Schrag:

But it might be on the state or national level.

Jeff Winstel:

Could be. This is something that Metro has to make the decision to do. And it's quite frankly further complicated by—and I'm going to get real in the weeds here real fast and I apologize—but the Federal Transit Administration with the Federal Railway Administration developed a Program Comment for Section 106 that includes a lot of Exempted Activities from SHPO overview. That really changed the ballgame. I don't want to state official policy or anything like that, but it really does change how projects get reviewed and whether they have to go to the SHPO or not. Projects can be reviewed by the Federal Transit Administration.

Zachary Schrag:

Fascinating. When did that happen?

Jeff Winstel:

About three years ago.

Zachary Schrag:

I need to look that up. That's again goes right to the heart of this because I think it defines the challenge so much: how do you take some— Historic preservation, obviously Penn Station in New York was part of it, so it's not completely foreign to rail transportation. On the other hand, we're usually thinking of Rhodes Tavern or something. Not something so heavily trafficked.

Jeff Winstel:

For your reference the common name for this is the FAST Act. [Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act.]

Zachary Schrag:

I do want to ask about the jurisdictional difference. What you were talking about with the Weese design is the kind of triage process, where you're trying to hold some things.

The vaults are more important than the fare gates, right. But I also did wonder if there's any sense that the core DC stations might be more historically significant than the outline stations or even within that — I myself I think of Judiciary Square and Metro Center, frankly, in a different league. Maybe Dupont Circle because it's so lovely as compared to almost anything else in the system. Is there any sense of prioritization geographically, or differentiation?

Jeff Winstel:

I have to say no, because when looking at the historic significance, you have to look at the entire system. Obviously aerial structures or at-grade structures are going to be different than underground structures. One of the things that drove the layout of the system was the acquisition of existing but no longer used rail lines, and most of those were at grade. The other thing I would say is that the concepts were developed at the same time, like the gull-wing canopies. In general, when historic preservation—or I should say historic significance—is being considered it's not a ranking system. It either is or it isn't historic.

This gets kind of tricky. In terms of my opinion, the answer would be no, they all are equally significant based on the application of National Register criteria.

I would say that people seem to care much more about the underground vaulted—especially the cross-vaulted—stations in the monumental core. And that really does make more sense,

because it is more, I think, integral to our understanding of what is the monumental core and downtown DC than Rockville canopy in Rockville is to the history of Rockville. I mean it's kind of two systems, one's the subway and one's a light rail.

Zachary Schrag:

Right. Officially they're part of one system. Unofficially they're definitely parts that people care more about.

I wonder, I should ask you about non station areas. I certainly think that, by far, most people care about the stations that's what they see. Are there any parts of the system—again I'm thinking aerial structures or there's I think it's a chiller plant or something in Virginia Square that has the waterfall on it and it's just beautiful. But I don't think people think of it as iconic Metro architecture.

Are there non obvious parts of the system that you think there are architecturally significant in that way?

Jeff Winstel:

I'm going to say no. At this point we made a decision to consider just the stations.

I know that having worked on other rail lines, and other systems, typically it is a more comprehensive view, including rail yards, and cooling towers and also all sorts of stuff. But yeah it was—I don't want to say something like a gentleman's agreement—but what the SHPOs really cared about most were the stations.

Zachary Schrag:

I know that there was a story a while back about the Jackson Graham Building.

I've always thought it's function was to be background for the Building Museum—the Pension Building—and wasn't that important. I don't know if you have any comments on its architectural importance.

Jeff Winstel:

I did do an evaluation of that and concluded that it was not significant for National Register listing and the DC SHPO concurred.

Zachary Schrag:

Okay, great, so I think I will focus on the stations. Again, I need to talk to other people maybe about the map and the railcars, because I understand that's out of your jurisdiction.

I know this is a painful subject, but I think I need to ask you both about the paint. I know I'm going to be asked about the paint. Well, I've been asked about the paint many times.

There were there were a couple episodes. One in 1992 before you came, where I think the first paint was put on at Farragut North and a few other stations, and then there was the huge kerfuffle in 2017 with the Union Station painting.

I know you've said that was not brought to your attention in advance. I just wonder if there any effort, been made since then, to prevent similar surprises? That's as diplomatic as I can be on this.

Ivo Karadimov:

And I can speak to that.

First of all, I just want everyone to understand that the painting of the station wall vaults is entirely driven by WMATA's desire to keep the stations clean. Unfortunately that's how our maintenance department sees the painting. Even today, when I have conversations with them stressing that the paint is not the solution, I guarantee you they don't fully understand my point

of view. The perception is, if you paint a wall you'll make the wall cleaner and also, unfortunately, the perception is that the exposed concrete is not a real finish.

We are dealing with this challenge, and I don't think it we're going to fully solve this in the future.

Now, as far as the process goes, in terms of approval and control, all the provisions are there. I would like to read you a very short paragraph of WMATA Manual of Design Criteria, which is like the Bible for Metro, the governing document for everything that is built on all WMATA property. It states: “any temporary or permanent modification which will impact the appearance of a facility or a structure, and is located in public space or is otherwise viewable by the public, may be subject to review by the US Commission of Fine Arts, National Capital Planning Commission, National Park Service, state historic preservation offices, and/or various other local and federal entities. As such, it must be reviewed by the WMATA Manager of Architecture”.

So that is clearly stated. If WMATA follows the process as written, all such requests will come to me, and I will be the one making the decision. Unfortunately, as I stated earlier, being a very large organization, where “silos” are in play, some people just don't know who to ask.

Specifically for Union Station, what happened was an assistant general manager, at that level, actually observed the deteriorated concrete at the vault walls, asked the question, how can we fix it? The person who was right next to him basically stated, “Oh, we can just paint over it and it will look like new.” And that's how they did it.

Nobody even thought about reading the design criteria first and see what it says, or about checking with the chief architect. So I think we're getting better. I am confident my message is coming across. At all levels. Jeff is doing his job in communications with other stakeholders, making sure that paint is not the solution.

But as you know, there are already precedents. Archives/Navy Memorial is another station that's been painted. Farragut North, Stadium Armory. Once you paint the station the process becomes irreversible, The only way to maintain a paint is to repaint over. I don't think we have the capacity to sand blast the paint off, or that it's going to probably result in more damage.

I don't know Jeff, what you think about that.

Jeff Winstel:

Well, a few comments. One is the original finish was supposed to be a silicone, feather blasted treatment. That was in the specs, it’s on all the drawings. Our friend Bill Gallagher told me how tired he got of printing that out over and over and over again, back in the day.

The other thing is that to WMATA’s credit, after the Union Station painting, Mr. [General Manager Paul] Wiedefeld started a program of cleaning more often. That really reduced the grime and the dirt. We have a metal on metal system, and it makes brake dust, and it's in an underground vault. So the fact that we're cleaning the stations, including the vaults, four times a year—as opposed to when we could or whatever their maintenance schedule was—is a huge improvement I think not only the grime effect, but also the lighting.

It’s always really exciting to build something new and maintaining a thing is not exciting.

The other thing is that because we don't really have a reliable, annual, dedicated funding source that makes maintaining things at a good level difficult. Other things come along that are more pressing, like safety.

So I think we're doing a lot better, and I think there is an understanding of what the proper treatment is. As Ivo said it's larger organization and things happen.

Zachary Schrag:

Well, if I could pivot to that, the opposite end—not the only happy story, but a really happy story here, is the lighting redesign. One of the reasons—I had heard Mr. Engle present on the lighting last year, before I accepted the invitation to do this, and actually one of the reasons I wanted to give this talk is to learn more about that because—my heart is on my sleeve here—not only as a

rider do I like to see better lighting, but as a historian it's fascinating to hear Engle talk about Bill Lam with such respect.

And to think about how he's taking Lam's objectives and realizing them with the technology that did not exist in 1967 or even, in some cases in 2007. I mean some of the LED fixtures he put in if, from what I understand, are really quite new in terms of color temperature and other capacities that he can do.

Could I just hear from you like how that decision was made to redo the lighting and also how did you end up with someone so historically attuned as Claude Engle?

Ivo Karadimov:

Another interesting story.

First of all, lighting is a major component of the stations design. I actually had the pleasure of meeting with Bill Lam. He actually came to my office, and what struck me is the passion that he had. At the time when I met him, he must have been probably around ninety years old. But you could see that passion, when he was talking about lighting of the station. He pulled a piece of paper in front me and start sketching things out. You can tell that he's got all the ideas, everything was in his head. He was really trying to do something about lighting.

Unfortunately, the original station lighting was based on older technology. What really changed the game was the introduction of the LED lights, especially the capacity of the optics, which I'm sure Claude has talked about in more detail. When we talk about happy stories here, when Claude replaced the lighting in the first station, and I think it was Federal Triangle station, we completely switched from the fluorescent to the LED lighting on the pylons and the track bed light, Bill Gallagher, saw the station. He was in awe. He said, I cannot believe that we finally were able to accomplish Bill Lam's goal of lighting. This is exactly how Bill Lam envisioned the lighting of the stations,

This to me was just the realization of how one's design—somebody's design—can actually be implemented even many, many years after his passing.

So how did I meet Claude Engle?

I actually first met with Claude senior, who is the father. He is the founder of the firm. One day he called me, and he said that what prompted his call was seeing the globe lights that they've just installed at Friendship Heights station. And that will be, in my opinion, the equivalent to the painting of the concrete, is what the globe lights did to the lighting at Friendship Heights. I don't know if you remember that, Zach.

And he said, who did this? Why did you guys allow this? Again it was a system maintenance department trying to do their best to improve the lighting.

And I said well, how can you help us? Is there anything you can do to help us design a better lighting? And he basically offered their services and that's how we started this great work relationship. I'm really, really proud of the work they've done to improve our station lighting.

Zachary Schrag:

Fantastic .

Mr. Winstel, do you want to add anything to the lighting story? I mean again, I have a lot of material from the Mr. Engle.

Jeff Winstel:

The only comment I have about the lighting is, it's like everything else in an older system. Somebody asked me once, What would you do to improve the lighting? I said, I'd replace the dead bulbs! I think it's a maintenance issue, largely.

Zachary Schrag:

It’s interesting—I was going through my files, I have a document from, I think, 1968 from DeLeuw, Cather commenting on Lam’s design. And they're saying, this is beautiful. Just so you know, it's a little maintenance intensive.

All of this was foreseen 50 years ago. I think the finances perhaps less so.

Ivo Karadimov:

And just one last thought on the lighting. There are two improvements with the LED technology that are critical.

One is the longevity of the lights, which is over 10 years, so you don't have to replace light, in theory, for 10 years.

And two, they're fully encapsulated fixtures, which means that they’re IP 66 rated and can be submerged in water and still function, which allows WMATA maintenance personnel to basically wash them directly with a hose,. And that was not possible with the fluorescent fixtures before.

Those two improvements are critical to making the switch to the LED technology.

Zachary Schrag:

Fantastic .

I do want to ask about the tiles because that's another iconic 1960s design that I think has gone through multiple iterations. At one point, there were those squares that had the hexagonal imprint in them and then have you gone back to hexagonal tiles? I’ve lost track of where the tiles are.

Ivo Karadimov:

The original tiles were the hexagon shaped, quarry tiles. Those are the original tiles.

About 10 years ago, I believe, the decision was made to switch to what we call “oversized” concrete pavers, which are precast concrete pavers with embossed hexagon pattern on top.

I was not part of that decision, but I’m told what was driving it was durability, since a concrete paver, given its thickness, is probably the most durable product out there. Also in terms of withstanding the rain, snow, and everything else, it's probably the most durable. The second criteria was finding a product that can be installed quickly, given the fact that, during a station rehabilitation project we don't want to shut the station for a long period of time, affecting customers. So having a 24 by 24 oversized paver obviously makes the installation much quicker than having individual hexagon shaped pavers. That's what drove the decision to switch to those concrete papers.

Now, one exception was the Silver Line, new stations. They've introduced the porcelain tile. Just the square—I believe—12 by 12 porcelain tile on the mezzanines only. They're pretty durable and they have good impact resistance,

The problem with porcelain tile is first, there are only a few manufacturers in the US that can meet the WMATA specification requirement and, as you know, or maybe you don't know, for federally funded projects, the funding coming from the Federal Transit Administration, there's a requirement for a Buy America product. So finding porcelain tile that meets the Buy America requirement was difficult. In addition, what we have found is the porcelain tile does not have a good coefficient of friction, what is referred to a slip resistance.

That's how we essentially arrived at the concrete paver. Currently we're having a lot of issues with the concrete pavers, including on the new stations for the Silver Line. The paver system—without getting into too much technical details—is supposed to be permeable, so the water is flowing under and it drains out. The concrete paver system uses a cementitious setting which is

being washed out by the water flowing under the pavers. That leeches out to the to the platform edges and creates some issues with the edge lighting and other infrastructure.

So we are now switching back to the original hexagonal paver, but to improve slip resistance we've introduced a new surface, which is what they call a wire-cut finish. You can see those new pavers installed at the newly rehabilitated aboveground stations.

For example: Vienna, Dunn Loring and King Street station platforms were recently replaced with that the new hexagonal pavers. It gives you the durability, as well as the coefficient of friction. And obviously maintains the historic look.

Zachary Schrag:

And what are those made out of, the newest ones?

Ivo Karadimov:

Quarry.

Zachary Schrag:

So you're back to quarry, just with a different finish?

Ivo Karadimov:

Yes. Not only are we back to quarry, but we're back to the original manufacturer: Summitville, which I think it was the one that was specified in the in the original station design. I think they're the only manufacturer now producing that specific tile within the US.

Zachary Schrag:

I'd like to ask a document preservation because , one of the things that concerns me, frankly, is the reliance on human memory. You have some folks like Bill Lam and Claude Engle Sr., who brought the 1960s modernism into the 21st century through sheer longevity. But if we're talking about maintaining this for many generations—centuries—all three of us will be gone as well.

What are the efforts being made to preserve design documents, both from the 1960s and 70s, but also whatever is produced today? If someone 50 years from now wants to understand how you made that decision about the tiles is there an effort to archive this material?

Jeff Winstel:

I'll jump in here,

We do not have an archival program. We do not have an archivist. And I'm not trained as an archivist.

There was an accumulation of materials—I think I contacted you about this actually—that the photographer who had been with WMATA for 25-some years had just acquired. People would just give him stuff like, Oh, this is old. Here.

When he left there was no plan to take care or stock of any of this stuff. He had tons of slides. Also, going through his material, it was obvious that he had photographs and negatives, and even some documents from our predecessor agencies, which were not few. A whole collection of trolleys in the snow predates WMATA. So I did make arrangements with George Washington University Special Collections and we basically donated 55 boxes of this material. They acquired it and they have it accessible to scholars and students. It's not exactly in our archival program for WMATA but this stuff didn't end up in a dumpster.

That's not really at the level of interest you're asking about.

Zachary Schrag:

Right. Part of the archivist's plea is to get people understand that we're constantly creating more history. Engle is looking at Lam's designs, but the Engle designs 50 years from now will be of great interest.

Jeff Winstel:

I should add, we have a legal archive, which is a separate thing.

Zachary Schrag:

But that's very limited, and I think it gets destroyed after some statute of limitation runs out. It's not a permanent archive.

Jeff Winstel:

I'll let the lawyers answer to that.

Zachary Schrag:

Okay, I mean I don't want to press you on this. As I told Mr. Karadimov, this has been my plea for 15 some years now. Every time I talked to anyone with a WMATA.com address I say, hey, have you thought about archivist?

Carmen Turner almost hired one. If she had lasted a little longer as GM and not gotten the Smithsonian job WMATA probably would have an archivist now.

She was starting up the program.

Jeff Winstel:

I didn't realize that.

Zachary Schrag:

This was again 20 years some years ago, but I talked a retired archivist from the National Archives, I believe, who had started off specing that out, and never got very far.

This is out of nowhere, but I did mean to ask it. I know it's not officially landmark but the AIA 25 year award in 2014, I think was an effort by Gallagher and other Weese fans to add some not legal but maybe moral suasion to recognizing the value of the architectural design. Did that work? Do you think that that AIA award had any impact within the authority or on your own work in helping bring attention to the value of that design?

Jeff Winstel:

I think it did have some positive impact, but getting listed in the National Register of Historic Places has a lot of implications for an agency like ours, and ultimately, it's a management decision.

Zachary Schrag:

Okay, so the register listing—that would have that would that trigger more legal or formal requirements in the way that you do work?

Jeff Winstel:

Well, it depends on who is SHPO!

Zachary Schrag:

Okay, fair enough so really depend on this, the state offices.

Jeff Winstel:

For section 106, it is completely controlled by the federal agency. And we are not a federal agency.

Zachary Schrag:

But you will do have federal funding that occasionally triggers requirements?

Jeff Winstel:

Yes, and I typically am the one who does the work. The FTA processes it.

Zachary Schrag:

Sorry, this is just a really general question that I meant to ask earlier.

One of the things that makes Weese's design distinctive is it's minimalism. I wonder if it's a distinctive calendar to preserve minimalism against clutter as opposed to some like, Victorian building where there's already so much stuff going on?

This is not a well-formed question but it strikes me that—to take the National Building Museum, for example, where they're already niches and grooves everywhere—it may just be easier to run a wire or put in an air conditioning duct than in a 1960s blank, clean—. Is that is that a fair assessment?

Ivo Karadimov:

I would agree with you. I think the challenge with the minimalistic architecture is especially running in new infrastructure and trying to conceal it. It's extremely challenging.

Also keeping the exposed concrete walls clean from the deterioration is another challenge. And it's also costly. Some people don't understand that cleaning is not like "let's just get a bucket of water and wash it". But in order for us to clean a deteriorated concrete, we have to fix the leak behind the surface first. it's pointless to clean something that it's going to look exactly the same in a week. If you don't fix the source of the damage. I'm talking about the concrete surface deterioration caused by water leaks. It is very challenging

As far as clutter goes that's another challenge. We are trying to introduce new customer facing elements such as digital displays and at the same time trying to not populate the platform with too many things where people are going to get confused or it's going to reduce the waiting area for customers..

Jeff Winstel:

If I could also jump on that a little. One of the things about the design of a subway station, as opposed to the building across the street from JGB [Jackson Graham Building] is the intent of the subway station is to move people through, up, and out. It is not really a shelter type of thing. So, its function is moving people.

There are design elements of Harry Weese's design that are consistent with minimalism but also kind of reduce the potential for clutter. A very significant element of his design is the extent to which areas are separated from the outer wall, the vault wall.

When you enter a station from the escalators, you will see that there are handrails that project out at a 45-degree angle. That's very much intentioned to keep people from getting close to the wall and supposedly this will prevent graffiti. The perimeter walls around the mezzanine never touches the vault. Again, it's this kind of separation of spaces that Harry felt would reduce the opportunity for graffiti. And compared to any other system, I would think we have less graffiti, certainly less than New York.

At the same time, Harry anticipated that—for lack of better term—the grooves between the coffers and the vaults would provide ample space for conduit that is needed. Well, we have—I don't know, exponential times the need for the amount of conduit he had in mind. You can see

that in many, many places. And that kind of negates the minimalist approach to the design or the feel of it. When we put additional advertising elements up sometimes that will make the space more commercial than public which was something that Harry was very concerned about—that people don't feel like they're trapped in an advertisement. So, the minimalist kind of approach is challenging but I think that there were thoughtful design elements included that help maintain that.

Zachary Schrag:

And the conduit needs is that for wi fi, or emergency services, or what?

Jeff Winstel:

[Laughs.] Electricity. Go for it, Ivo!

Ivo Karadimov:

All of the above. It's for electrical as well as communication services.

Zachary Schrag:

I think the last thing I have on my list—we've been jumping around a little bit—is again, I know this was before your time, but the escalator canopies are significant addition to the system, beyond the Weese design. I'm just so fascinated by the way, that story played out where it went from a utilitarian system to something much more attuned to the design, obviously picking up on the idea of the coffered vault in those canopies.

I'm hoping to talk to Mr. Chenoweth about that.

Do you have any comments about any lessons learned from that how that affects your work or any thoughts about well, any just any comments on how those play into thoughts about Metro preservation?

Ivo Karadimov:

I'm not sure if this is necessarily directly related to Metro preservation, but the escalator canopy design—the one that was developed by Mr. Lourie and Mr. Chenoweth—has become a signature wayfinding element signifying the entrance to the Metro station. People associate the canopy with the Metro entrance, which is in line with what Jeff mentioned earlier about Harry Weese's idea of having continuity between stations and have repeated elements that you can see, pretty much everywhere at each station.

Just to be clear, the addition of the escalator canopy is driven by escalator and elevator codes also known as ASME standards, which requires for all new escalators a cover be provided directly over them, Otherwise the new escalators would not be allowed to be placed in service. Most people don't know that—most people think this is it's good to have—but in fact it's a requirement, driven by that standard.

WMATA cited code compliance when negotiating for escalator canopies be placed over some of the sites that are not our properties. We have five or six station entrances that are on National Park Service property. And we went through this long, and challenging discussion with the with them on how to mitigate the impact to the adjacent historic property. Not only historic, but most of them are monuments,

So, the escalator canopies are a very important station entrance element for WMATA.

Jeff do you want to chime in?

Jeff Winstel:

I think you pretty much touched on it. It's become recognized as kind of an iconic element of the downtown landscape and built environment. At the same time we have had to be site sensitive and have gone to a great deal of trouble, at a number of locations to modify the standard

design—the curvature, the tilt—to make it more visually compatible with the surroundings. Especially in some places that are just very tricky to deal with, like the Arlington Cemetery station on Memorial Drive. It's one of the most famous vistas of Washington between Arlington Cemetery and the Lincoln Memorial. You start building stuff there and people let you know what they think really quick.

Zachary Schrag:

It's fascinating. I hadn't thought of that. My experience, I must say, is I was skeptical at first. And then I was dropping my son off just this week and we're driving down Connecticut Avenue—where's Cleveland Park?—oh I'm going to spot that canopy so far ahead of my spotting the pylon. It really does make that moment.

Arlington Cemetery is really interesting. Are there other examples where it was hard to fit into the monumental landscape?

Ivo Karadimov:

I can think of one example where the canopy was so close to the adjacent historic building where we had to truncate it. That's the West Entrance at the Gallery Place/Chinatown station, that is directly adjacent to the National Portrait Gallery. We literally had to cut off the portion of the canopy that hangs over the historic fence on their property.

For the for the Judiciary Square entrance in front of the Building Museum, we had to not only coordinate with the Commission of Fine Arts, but also with the Police Memorial Fund, and the architect of the Memorial who very protective of the Memorial architecture. We had to basically lower it as much as we possibly can to make it less visible. So those are good examples.

Zachary Schrag:

That's fascinating because that's a lot of the same stations that were hard to build in the first place. The whole portrait gallery had to be underpinned for Metro construction, so it's great to hear the resurgence of the story.

Jeff Winstel:

Let's talk about that original architecture.

Zachary Schrag:

I've hit what I think are going to be some of the most important—I want to sketch out the bureaucratic landscape, but I just love the individual story. We've got the lighting, the tiles, the canopies. The paint has to go in there.

Let me just ask are there other elements of architecture that you think belong in this story.

Ivo Karadimov:

I would say the granite benches. They have become an element that is almost timeless.

And we are introducing granite benches now in the above ground station rehabilitation projects, where we were changing shelters, with the new shelter design. And the benches, which were originally, I believe, made of wood, are now being changed to granite which resembles the granite bench of the underground station. We have found that that bench is extremely durable, never breaks, at least I'm not aware of an instance of a broken bench. And it's very easily cleanable. The granite bench is a great utilitarian element that we would like to preserve and continue to use in the future.

[a portion of the conversation, not directly related to Metro, has been cut here.]

Zachary Schrag:

Okay well I've taken a lot of your time is there is there anything else I should be asking before I let you go?

Ivo Karadimov:

I think we touched on all the important stuff.

Zachary Schrag:

Okay! Thank you so much, well, I will I will stop recording now and then I can say a few things about next steps.